

Focus Group-Avondale Park

Colleen: So this is Colleen and I'm here with a group of women who are currently staying at Avondale Park and they've agreed to talk with me about their experiences and so here we go. So, one of the things that the taskforce is interested in is where you're from and how you got here just as a starting point and whoever would like to start please feel free.

Woman: My family lived for many years in Shoreline, Washington. My husband and I are baby boomers and we have worked hard all our lives. We have been homeowners. We sold our home two years ago and we exhausted all incomes and resources. We experienced health conditions and disabilities earlier than our peers. And the trickle down is the sale of the home due to the market not picking up yet. Our nest egg was lost in the sale of the home. Very little proceeds allowed us to stay in motels when our not good credit anymore did not allow us to go from our house to an apartment within the community we lived for many years.

When money runs out to stay in motels we then stayed with three separate families for about five months. When that resource runs out, then we attempted shelters in downtown Seattle, which is far away from Shoreline, and the logistics of two parents with varying disabilities transporting a high schooler to Shoreline every day was not something we could; it was not feasible.

So that defaulted to us living in the van in the community we knew to stay close to our son's school. And the 211 system eventually allowed us shelter in transitional housing here in Redmond.

Colleen: And you have one child who's in high school?

Woman: We have one fifteen year old who has a recent, on the autism spectrum diagnosis, so ritual and clinging to that of which is familiar is something that he clings to in trying to cope with homelessness so he commutes to Shoreline every day.

Colleen: From here?

Woman: From here.

Colleen: On the bus?

Woman: On school district transport through McKinney-Vento.

Colleen: Thank you.

Woman: My family we originated from Seattle-Kent area. I have a eight year old son. I had him when I was sixteen. We started out living with my mom and when things didn't go right there because of domestic violence issues in the home, I found out about a service called Wellspring Family Services and I got housing through them. And I was there for about a year and a half until I had domestic violence issues with my son's father, which forced me to have to leave my home.

And once we left home we stayed back with my mom and friends and family. And it took us about four years before we actually got stable again. And so just now with the situation that we're going through I have a new baby coming and with my son going to school in Seattle he gets school transportation as well just because of the situation that 211 also helped us get here and my baby worker from the YWCA.

Beth: I'm Beth. I have two daughters, fairly young, between the ages of five and twelve. And I'm actually from an eastern state and I had a fairly severe domestic violence situation more affecting my kids physically than me. And so came to a point where a lot of circumstances came together and we fled that situation.

So we've been in Seattle area for about ten months. We first got here we had some money again getting the lay of the land trying to get established you run of money basically, and you have a couple of friends in the area you kind of exhaust the resources there. Because of the domestic violence situation we were coming from we got hooked up right away with an organization here called LifeWire. If you guys aren't already partnered with them, definitely you should do that.

It's been a long road. It was not until we were already in this area that our situation back in our home state became really clear to me. My daughter started to talk to me and stuff. So once we got here, things sort of cascade downward. We were outside the situation, but I learned more and more about it and dealing with the consequences and took us months to get a restraining order. My husband's family has money and so there was constant delays which exhausted resources from my family and it has been a long road.

So you were right earlier. I'm happy to hear you guys saying you're doing a lot of data collecting and probably one of the biggest things that I have that maybe not everybody who's homeless has is a lot of knowledge. I used to read a lot about this kind of stuff. I have a degree in social science. I know a lot of people have misconceptions about homelessness. Education, certainly, joblessness I've been out of the job force several years raising my daughters now it's hard to get back in especially with a lot of what we've been dealing with.

So our road here came through what they call couch surfing, 211 was a part of it, but if you don't want to lie, you actually literally have to be living on the street. So I picked a time where we were between couches and called. In the meantime we were able to get emergency shelter apartment through LifeWire. We were there for almost three months before this place opened up and we were thankful to have it. We're three kids and an animal packed into a one bedroom apartment here. We came at the wrong time, but everybody's really cool and the road to stability is so long for us.

And just, in general, I want to respond to something you were saying, Colleen, earlier is I think a lot of cities have the approach where it begins to be administratively making poverty a crime and I think if a community can stay away from that, you actually get a better response to getting people off the street and into stable housing and services. Making poverty a crime is really not where you need to go in my opinion. So I'm happy you guys are doing a lot of education and awareness is probably your biggest asset to this community because you have so many people with resources.

Redmond's a really well to do area overall and I think a lot of these people and probably ten years ago if you'd asked me if I knew much about homelessness I really didn't. My life was really stable. I was a homeowner all that kind of stuff. And your life can change given a few circumstances that you didn't even choose. You're responding to circumstances. A lot of domestic violence I've talked to many women in the last year or two; you respond to circumstances that you didn't make. Even if you make every one of the good decisions, you're still having to live with the fallout of that. So I drive around and I look at all these people that have money and I wonder if they're thinking about the people who don't have money.

Poverty is about homelessness. Poverty is about money. Those two things are inextricably linked. There's a lot of working poor now. People who are working and still can't afford a place to live. So it's a complex issue. It's not just addiction. It's not just mental illness.

Colleen: Thanks. And where do your kids go to school?

Beth: One of my kids goes to school in Issaquah and they'll be here. My youngest is in daycare right now so they'll be both in this school district this fall.

Woman: I grew up in the Kirkland-Bothell area. I came from a really good family and I moved out when I was seventeen and just from there I kind of led my own life. I got into a relationship with my youngest daughter's father and he was an alcoholic and pathological liar and a narcissist. It took me a long time to leave. I would leave and then come back. I got sucked into this cycle of abuse. We've had a couple domestic violence situations and I kind of exhausted my options. Every time I'd go back to him I'd lose more people in my life.

And so finally, I left. I got a place of my own. I was without him for about nine months and then he weaseled his way back in. He moved in with me and about three months later we had broken up because his alcoholism was really bad. He was getting very abusive emotionally and mentally and just like throwing things in front of the kids and they saw and heard things. I mean the way he talked to them was awful too. So I broke up with him and hounded him to move out and then he wouldn't move out and his grandma agreed to let him stay.

So while he was staying we got into another domestic violence dispute and from there things just spiraled downward. In the process of getting a restraining order he was also very sexually abusive and would force his way into my home. He vandalized my car and stuff, so my living situation became really unsafe and I had to go into a shelter. I called all these different shelters and there was one in Snohomish County that I was able to get into for about a month and a half. One of the programs they have is Rapid Rehousing but I wasn't really a good candidate for it because I was a full-time student. I'd been going to school to become a PA. And so from there I luckily got into Acres of Diamonds...

Colleen: Can you explain how that made you not a candidate for the Rapid Rehousing?

Woman: Because I didn't have an income.

Colleen: Oh, I see you have to have income.

Woman: So Rapid Rehousing you have to pretty much prove to them that you'll be able to be self-sufficient after six months because they help with your rent until that point. And I mean, I guess, I could have quit school and tried to find a job, but then that would have just been me trying to find another job and who knows how long that would have worked out. This way I feel like I'm setting myself and my children for a better future by going to school for a good career.

But so I got accepted to this Christian based program in Duvall called Acres of Diamonds and it was a shared living situation with women in a big house. And then about a month and a half in I got a call from Family Housing Connection that I had gotten in here and I was really excited about it because I needed to be close to my family and I'd felt cut off from everybody and everything. And so I moved here and since then I've been taking my classes. I do really well in school. I mean there have been a lot of challenges that I've faced with my children and their parents and the whole restraining order and stalking thing, but I feel like it's on the upward slope.

Colleen: You have two children?

Woman: Yes.

Colleen: And their ages are about?

Woman: My daughter's two and a half and my son is seven and a half.

Jalisa: I'm Jalisa. [sp] I grew up in Seattle. I lived in Seattle for sixteen years. My battle with homelessness came about I'd say when I moved in with my grandma when I was about eighteen years old. A situation happened between my uncle, which is her son; he put his hands on me so I was basically forced to leave the house. I went and moved in with my mother. She lost her Section 8 housing due to not paying her light bill.

So I had to go back to my grandma's house; after being in an apartment with no lights for a month and a half I finally got to go to my grandma's house and her home got foreclosed a month later so after her home was foreclosed I moved in with my boyfriend at the time. I got pregnant maybe a year and a half later. He left me then I moved in with my sister. I stayed basically on her couch my whole pregnancy and she got evicted a month after I had my child.

Then I called Family Housing Connection and they offered me a shelter in Fremont. So we stayed there for about a month and then after that month that's when I got the call for [inaudible]. So a lot of my homelessness was due to when I was growing up my grandparents spoiled me a lot so basically, I didn't have to work for anything. But then once things happened they lost their money and my grandfather passed away there was really no money left so I didn't know what to do.

So I started a job and moved in with my sister. She got put and then when I got here it felt like I was finally stable because I didn't know where I was going to raise my son by myself. I couldn't know where I was going to raise him but when we got here it just felt like so support. It's an awesome program; do much support.

Colleen: I can hear tears in your voice.

Jalisa: Just happy about it. And then we got here and everything was on the up and up. I got a car. I started working. My son's in daycare. He's happy. He has friends here.

Colleen: How old is your son?

Jalisa: He's eleven months. I've had about three years of homelessness going back and forth between house and house. Finally, to have my own space even though it is considered a shelter, it feels like home.

Zero: I guess it's my turn now. I'm Zero [sp]. I've been homeless for about three and half years myself. I'm a victim of my own circumstance to tell you the truth.

Growing up in foster care really made me kind of headstrong, so once I turned eighteen, I decided I didn't have to listen to anybody anymore so I didn't. And my adopted mother did the whole tough love thing and put me on my butt. And in the years since then I've walked over two thousand miles. I've slept under every bridge you can think of. I've stood on the corner in the pouring rain trying to make money for food to put in my stomach. I've pretty much done everything.

That was about two solid years and then I went traveling again put my backpack on and started walking. And I've had the same boyfriend the whole time oddly enough. And we were about two thousand miles away in Reno this time last year and found out I was pregnant so we thought hey, why don't we try the whole responsibility thing and go home. And I was probably about three months along when we got home.

Colleen: Where's home?

Zero: Here. Seattle, well not here in Redmond, but Seattle for the most part. I mean I lived in Renton since I was eight. So we started that, so we were sleeping on the side of the freeway in downtown Seattle. Both of us tried getting into housing although we weren't too picky about staying together. The whole goal was to get me off the streets. I stayed at one shelter for a week La Botella. [sounds like] It actually has the most spots out of all of the shelters in Seattle but it has fastest turnaround. Nobody wants to stay there. I was there for a week when I was four months pregnant and I got eaten alive by bedbugs the whole time.

So I stayed there for a week and then I got a mobility transfer, which means you get put higher on priority to move to a different place, and that put me in New Ground Sand Point so it's this same, but in Sand Point. I was in a big six bedroom house with five other women so that was kind of nice. You got people to lean on. I got married this last September and I had my son in November.

At the house in Sand Point nobody except for a professional is allowed to come to the house. You can't have visitors, so that meant that my husband wasn't even allowed to ring the doorbell and we didn't have a phone so he couldn't come see me as I'm getting to the end stretch of the pregnancy. Once I had my son, he couldn't come see him. We weren't in any sort of situation where we didn't want to see each other. It was just hard while he was looking for work.

And my case manager saw him outside all the time waiting for me in the pouring rain and she took pity on us, she felt for us being a mom herself and having her own kid. And she finally when I was leaving one day said I've been talking to Mimi and we think you qualify for housing together and that's how

we ended up here in Redmond. And now we're living together and we're raising our son together. And it makes me feel like full circle that I've gone from not listening to anybody and not thinking that my mom and everyone has things that they want to teach me to having it all sink in. And now I'm raising my own child and I'm trying to be wise and budget and figure things out now.

I don't know it's nice. We pay our own bills. We got a place we can just go to and we look outside and it's pouring down rain and we don't have to think where am I going to go? Where am I going to sleep? How am I going to stay dry tonight? We don't have to worry about any of that. My son doesn't have to worry about it.

Colleen: And how old is your son?

Zero: He is six months.

Colleen: So some of you have alluded to this, but how are you spending most of your time while you're here? What are you working on? And how long you do you imagine you'll be here? And what do you think is next?

Woman: I've been here for a year now. I've already graduated my program so I have maybe anywhere from the next year or so, nine to twelve months, to be here. And I go to school currently at South Seattle Community College for a medical office professional. And that's basically what my time consists of. It's a Monday through Thursday schedule from 9 to 4:30 and with my son's school schedule it's kind of working out because he has an afterschool program that runs until five. So he is picked up by 7:45 and back by 6:30 so my schedules pretty [inaudible] with him and then along with my doctors' appointments for my new baby I keep them all on Friday so I can have the time to get the weekend together for myself. But I have a really busy schedule.

Colleen: So your plan when you finish your school program?

Woman: My plan is well what we do the last three months of our semester we do a clinical, which is where we go into the workplace and we do all the extra things that we need to do to get our hours to actually become certified medical office professionals. And while we're doing our internship, they can intend to hire us permanently or when we leave we just find our own job in the medical office professional.

Colleen: Do you think that you'll be able to transition directly from here into your own apartment? Are you going to make enough money to have that be realistic?

Woman: Well, graduating my program that's basically a Section 8 based project where I will be moving into. So once I leave from here I'll automatically have a place

where I'm going which is permanent housing for me. So my rent should just go off of my income that I'll be making.

Colleen: Based on your income. Okay, and is that because you're in a particular program here or is that true for everybody?

Woman: It's just because I'm in a particular program here. Not all the units are graduating. I just so happen to be in one of the graduating units.

Colleen: Okay, interesting.

Woman: I am not in a graduating unit and I am really busy too though. I go to school full-time. My son's well obviously he's in first grade so he goes to school and then he goes to the YMCA afterschool program and my daughter goes to KinderCare.

I am at Lake Washington and I'm working on my associate's in medical assisting and then I'm going to get my hours as a medical assistant and letters of recommendation so I can transfer to the UW for their physician's assistant program. I haven't quite figured out how I'm going to pay for it but I always figure out a way to make that work with like grants and loans if I have to, but I think it'll be worth it in the end. But I've just been busy with school.

I'm trying to get a part-time job, but I'd like it to be in the medical field just so that I can hopefully work my way in. But my goal is to work in family practice. So next spring I graduate with my associate's and then I'll be doing an externship in a medical office as well. Then from there they can hire you. And you kind of get to choose where you want to do your externship. So I'll do that for a year and then try to apply to UW.

Colleen: How long can you stay here?

Woman: I've only been here for I believe two months so I can be here up to two years. And then being that I'll be working in the field as a medical assistant, I mean, it shouldn't be an issue to afford a place on my own. My only concern is when I go to the UW having to work the logistics of that where I work as a medical assistant and then I'm a student as well so.

Colleen: And raising kids.

Woman: Yeah. But I'm strong, I'll make it work.

Beth: This is Beth again. I'm still dealing with a lot of fallout from a very nasty divorce that's ongoing and stalled in the state where I came from so that takes up my time. Also, dealing with some complex medical issues for my daughter and myself. So, for me, I'm still putting out a lot of fires. The next big step will

be getting back into the workforce. I already have a BA. Unfortunately liberal arts BAs are worth about high school now unless you have a foot in the door somewhere. So, that's kind of the next order of business for us, but just a lot of just life stuff to take care of in order to get us there.

We've been here about three months and we're in the Hopelink Program so you can be here up to two years. One of the requirements you're probably aware of this, Colleen, is while you're here under Hopelink's Program anyway you're applying to other housing programs that are income based. So for us hopefully we won't be here the whole two years but if we need to we can. And by that time I'm hoping that we're more stable and a job for me and just kind of living life.

Woman: Our family is also in the process of still putting out fires. That was a good way to put it. When we sold our home, we're just a small family, Mom, Dad and teenage son, ninth grader, and when we sold our home two years ago it was just Mom who has not recovered from mobility issues. I have a bad knee and a bad back. I have an old injury from what I was fifteen that in my knee, it's not operable. So it's a continuing thing. I'm young in terms of Social Security. So, I've only worked three places in my entire life. I'm a little over fifty. So I've been a solid worker and once you become injured and you're not able to resume physical work, then if you don't have a college degree, what do you do?

So that's where Mom was at when we began our homeless journey. Over the course of our journey, son was going through a yearlong process of evaluation to learn about learning behavior issues. It turns out son does have some features on the autism spectrum similar to the Asperger's type. So that gets added to the plate. Also, along the journey, Dad has dizzy spells, goes into ER. Turns out Dad has brain aneurysm and has brain surgery a year ago last February.

So, healing process from that makes life very different, because Dad isn't the same anymore. So we're still putting out fires in terms of maintaining medical appointments, medical support for each person in our family and each person continuing their journey with what's on their plate. So our time here is limited. Most obvious possible source to rebuild income sadly is to pursue Social Security applications for all three of us.

So, it's weird. It's unexpected. For a mom and a dad that have been hard workers; Dad's been a carpenter and jack-of-all-trades and it's just weird to be in these circumstances. So we're in the process of rebuilding income through Social Security avenues first. And at the same time, trying to learn where baby boomers without college degrees fit into this ever-changing world of technology.

Colleen: How long have you been here and how long can you stay?

Woman: We are in our eighth month and it's a two-year limit.

Zero: Zero here again. We've lived here, I think four, four months now. I think four-and-a-half and we can stay here two years. Me, mostly I'm just, I get to stay home with the baby. I'm spoiled. My husband, he works his tail off at Target. But he gets night shifts, though he usually starts around the three o'clock or so and gets off at eleven. So he can take care of baby at night and we just sort of sit and wake up in the morning. That's nice. It gives us plenty of time to bond with our son. He's going to be very spoiled.

Although, I'm looking into working; I've begun applying at places because you can only look at the same walls so many times before you get cabin fever. And coming from where I come from cabin fever isn't something that's enjoyable. I mean you kind of like those walls. So I'm going to start getting a job so I can get friends and we'll save up and, hopefully, go on to our own apartment, or if we can find a place cheap enough in Renton we'll get a little house, a little rambler, right by the elementary school and we'll walk our little boy to school and all that. And we'll have the American dream, white picket fence, big shiny bow, the works.

Colleen: How will you handle childcare if you get a job?

Zero: My husband is actually working on that. I have to take care of making sure there is food in the house. He takes care of getting childcare and making sure that there's diapers and bikes and such like that. Making sure rent is paid. So we've split it like that.

Colleen: So will you have to pay someone to do childcare if you work?

Zero: We are connected with DSHS, so because I don't have income and it's a three-person household, we get food stamps. And because we qualify for basic food, we qualify for assistance with daycare. So depending on what daycare we choose, we will either have nothing to pay or just a small portion to pay. So it will really depend on what we decide to go with. I'm not just going to choose any old daycare. But I think I'm going to have to bow out because it's my little man's bedtime.

Colleen: Thank you for joining us.

Zero: Yes, thank you very much.

Jalisa: Jalisa again. I spend my time raising my son, of course. I work Monday through Friday from about nine to three. On weekends I go help my mom. She's disabled. So, me and my son go spend some time with her on weekends.

And my son is also in childcare. He's in a home daycare in Bellevue that is picked for DSHS childcare as well. And just like Mimi was saying, I'm also in a program, the program where you can graduate from here. So this is my ninth month. I have three more months to go to graduate. And then after that it's a year until I get permanent housing.

Colleen: What do you all think is important for our task force, who's talking about these issues in Redmond, this is really about dealing with this in Redmond. What do you think they should know and do you have any specific ideas or suggestions that you think they should be considering in terms of actions that could or should be taken?

Jalisa: Jalisa. The only thing I think that they should look at is it's just as well as there's good and bad poor people, there's good and bad rich people. So I don't think that they should make poverty a crime or a stereotype as to all homeless people or committing crimes because that's not true. I don't know as far as what they should do as to the ones who are in poverty committing crimes. I don't have any suggestions for that.

Beth: This is Beth again. I think probably I already mentioned some of the things that I would first think about. But there are a lot of great resources and research has already been done on other communities on how they've handled problems with homelessness that appear to be new to them because it's just getting bigger and so it's coming into their communities.

I think when my case manager mentioned this panel she was suggesting that some of these questions that you guys might have, people may not be really aware in the community how much homelessness that there is that they don't see. And probably one of the best things you could do is, like I said it before, educate and make aware that homelessness is complex. It's not just the guy who stands in front of Safeway asking for change. He may be homeless, too. There might be issues there. Maybe he's asking for services. But for every one on the night, the yearly night count, there's probably, I'm guessing, I haven't read the research, but there's probably dozens or hundreds that are right on the edge of homelessness.

When we first got to Washington State, in the first few months and I had to go down to Vancouver at one point. And I remember staying at the rest area. But I actually found out about it on Yelp. Because it's legal to park your car there overnight. And in the morning I woke up early and I just watched, and it was clear that most of the people who were staying there are not traveling through. They're people who are working poor. They're getting ready for work in the morning and living in their car. Zero mentioned the American dream and, quite a bit older than them, I'm not young anymore. It's maybe still there, but for a lot of people in that margin or middle who've had to deal with any kind of

domestic violence or anything, it's something that becomes very real to be able to afford places like even if we are working.

Even when I do get a job, my concern is will it make enough to actually get me on the road to stability and I can't think that far in advance right now. I just have to go do it on faith. But that's a huge issue for those people that you see. There's this, all this en masse that you don't see who are struggling. The community can probably decide to become educated and the government of this city can do its most good probably to put out the right kind of information that'll lead the community to be able to realize how complex the problem is that you can't put an ordinance Band-Aid on it. You can't have, you can't solve it by having these exclusion zones. Or not letting people who aren't dressed right into a store or into the library. These are all public accommodations.

Every time these people buy something they're paying taxes, too. Every time they buy gas or they go into the store and buy something, everybody's paying taxes. I've seen before a lot of people who have money and probably me when I had money, you don't think about it enough that you start thinking of an us and them. And anything that a community can do to break down that barrier and realize how much in common. And you've heard stories here tonight, people going to school, people working, people hit with unexpected illnesses, bankruptcies, other things they didn't plan on; these are all the things that everybody, no matter how much money, deals with. Just how much cushion do you have? And if that person's cushion was taken away and they dealt with unexpected circumstance they would find themselves in the same shoes that all of us are in.

Beth: I think another big thing is if it weren't for knowing certain people that have gone through homelessness and been in the system, I wouldn't have been aware of half of resources and the services that are available. So I think that's a big thing is letting people know what is available for us. I didn't know that McKinney Vento was available to me until my mom had done some research for me. And then I didn't know, I mean, there was just a ton of services that I was unaware of. I was really scared that I wasn't going to have anywhere to go. And I freaked out, because being a single mom and it's scary if you have to think about living in your car with two little kids.

So I think if people were more aware of what's available, whether it be rapid rehousing or transitional housing or all the different shelters. How are they supposed to know other than calling? Even when I had to call around, it was so frustrating because everyone's like oh, no, we're full. Or oh, you have to go through 211 to get a hold of us, or figure it out through them and then they'll set you up. And it's like okay, well, what am I supposed to do?

So, if it weren't for finding the shelter in Snohomish County, I would have been out on the streets for a really long time. I guess I just lucked out in a

sense, but I think it's important that people know what's out there and what is available. I think that they should make it a little bit more accessible to people that are trying to get into shelters.

Colleen: More accessible in terms of ease of process or more places?

Beth: Ease of process.

Woman: Both.

Beth: But it is super frustrating. I mean to call and have people be like, oh, sorry, you have to go through 211. Well, half of the time when you have to go through 211 you're still being put on a waiting list just to get into a shelter.

Jalisa: I was on the waiting list for three years.

Beth: Yeah, it's crazy.

Colleen: How do you think anyone could help make that more known to people? What would it take for everyone to kind of know that those resources are, whatever resources as limited as they might be, are available.

Beth: Well, I feel they're, almost kept under wraps. It's like, because they don't want these people to ask for some, so they don't run out or something. I don't know what it is, but it just seemed like they were kind of not highlighted so people didn't really know about them unless you had connections or you knew someone that had gone through the system.

I have even had people come to me that are, like, oh, what do I do. I'm a situation where you have me in [inaudible]. And so, I've had to help direct them in the right areas, too. I do know like when I was in the shelter staying at, they always got this updated list of what shelters were accepting what kind of people and how many spots they had available. Why can't that be public knowledge? Why does it have to be just for a case manager and a case worker to know? Why can't it be for the public so that it helps people?

Woman: I called over the course of June, July and August, various times to the 211 and also experienced the, just call back. Oh, we'll know more on a certain day, call back. So just calling 211, it's not a one and done thing. It's like a wall you have to chip away at before you talk to the right operator that is going to, all the stars are aligned that day and they're going to be receptive to you and you win your appointment for intake for the housing system. So, not knowing anything about the system, it's weird.

Colleen: Do you have advice or ideas?

Woman: Well, seems to me it should work better than that. There's room for improvement.

Beth: This is Beth again. I didn't mean to interrupt you, but I agree with what I'm hearing. The 211 system, I think, is a grand plan. It's kind of an imperfect funnel. You have a lot of people funneling in, but it's not funneling out, I don't think, as well. That's just from our first blush with the program. I'm not even sure if where we are right now came about totally through 211 and there was a lot of advocacy from some of the organizations that we were working with and it helped that we got into a domestic violence shelter apartment. That kind of put us as if we were homeless, even though we had an apartment we were living in.

So, there are just so many shades of homelessness, isn't there? But I agree that the process, it's held a little bit like the lottery just to get an appointment, and then there was still months before you really knew whether that was going to be effective, during a big crisis for us back in September, October, losing the situation where we were at. We'd been staying with a friend and she just was at her limit as far as what she could do. And before another situation came open, there was a period of about two weeks where every day, I faced that gauntlet.

I was calling about ten or fifteen places every day because yeah, you can call 211, but if you're, literally, even if you're couch surfing, technically, you're not eligible, which I don't even, if you're lucky enough to find somebody's couch, I'm not sure how much different that makes you, logistically speaking, from being under an overpass. It's a lot better situation, but it's no more secure, really and so, if you're trying to be really honest, I wasn't able to call them, and say, yeah, I'm in my car today. So I picked a time between friends when I literally was in the car and called. I was, my nod to I own the car myself, but I agree that the process, it was just, it was vague [inaudible words], how the right place to go about it, so. It was strange.

Colleen: Did you want to add anything?

Woman: Sadly, yes. I'm thankful that Beth has her background in what she has because she is articulating things that need to be addressed in a surprisingly wonderful way for this meeting. So, in one of the families my family stayed with, there wasn't room for all of us, so Dad was on the street for this small section of time, if you are bunking up or couch surfing with someone who lives in an apartment, that person is living under regulations of that apartment.

So, if you are bunking up with them, you are not contracted to live there and for however many nights you are blessed with being allowed to stay, if management does not take any action of objection to these people walking on the premises and going to X apartment, even though everyone knows they aren't part of that household contracted with the apartment, you are on

borrowed time and you're not living honestly and you're constantly looking over your shoulder, is the manager going to approach us today? Are they here? When are they there? You're not sneaking because you can't hide, but you feel like you're sneaking and you're living honestly, but you're not technically supposed to be living there.

So if you get called out, then that's it. The gig's up. And you're still in the same homeless status as being the car or on the street. So that qualifier is a topic that could be explored and really should be. But, I mean, we all know it's due to the limited resources. So, our case manager has given a hoorah to encourage more housing. So I did my job there and something that I would kick myself for not having the courage to put out there, coming from Shoreline, Shoreline is not so different from Redmond. It is this suburban bedroom community north of Seattle. Redmond is a bedroom community off of Bellevue. Am I wrong? Okay.

So, what we saw in Shoreline is the same as what's going on over here. There are new homeless people walking around with backpacks. Their clothes aren't necessarily right off the rack. They might not be freshly laundered. They don't look all that different than a homeowner might look on a weekend working in the yard. There were days I would ask myself, wow, I'm washing my face and brushing my teeth at the public library. But this could also be a day that I might have popped in and I don't look that much different than if I'd been gardening.

So I'm encouraging communities to find the courage to get over their fears and assumptions about the homeless. I don't know what the statistics are. More data is definitely needed, because when you run out of money and resources and you no longer have a place to live, it does not make you a criminal. And we found ourselves in, once we were trickled down into just living in the van, that there were very limited places we could park. And there was one place we got away with for a while, but it was in a very quiet neighborhood and we understand, as homeowners, what is that car parked there again? There are people in it. This is weird. Somebody call someone.

It's out of place. It puts homeowners' feeling of safety at risk. But where are people to go? Do you want to corral them in some far corner into the county? Do you want to truck them over to the desert? Do you want to move them over to the shore? I mean, where do you want them to be? So, if you get over the fear and work the problem, the thing that seems to make the most sense is to fold them in, support, embrace. The numbers are not going to go down, especially with baby boomers who do not have enough in savings. We are the first of many that will follow.

My husband had brain surgery. His scar on his head, that one little girl said, oh Mommy, he looks like Frankenstein. He's diabetic. His feet don't allow him to walk straight. He saunters. He could be mistaken as a drunk. In stores that we

have spent hundreds, if not thousands of dollars, and in our own home community, he was turned away when he needed to use the restroom. He'd be turned away even upon purchasing something and in need of using a restroom. Once you are physically exhausted and fatigued and your body is breaking down, you just look terrible, but you are not a criminal.

So, for people who are homeowners consider imagining how many families that are living in houses right now might only be a few months away from the journey that my family has been through.

Woman: I think, too, the community works more with places that have community centers or the YMCA. I know YMCA allows people to come in that are not members and take a shower and clean up and go on their way. But if more people in more places were allowing stuff like that, or if we worked with motels to open up, more motel vouchers to families for a period of time or even apartment complexes to even have just a portion or a section that they offer up to people that are more low-income. Just working with the rich and the poor to come together because that's what community is.

Woman: Does one of you [inaudible words].

Jalisa: So, just like how she said, just more housing opportunities. There's not, and also, with them being racist. I was watching the news today and I seen a clip about a lot of homeowners when it came to different ethnicities to kind of rent their apartments, they were telling their rich or white people, not about that background checks, but black people and Latinos, they would be talking about background checks. So, it's just more of a stereotype when it comes to the community. If they were to help everyone, we would all still be able to have that place to live.

The people are being turned away because of the way they look, because of how they smell, and it's difficult to sit here and say that that many are turning away could have fought for you in the Army, in the military and could have been doing something for you and you don't even know that because you didn't take the time get to know them. You just told them no. You just told them to go away. And that's, like, how you, they were saying with your husband, you're judging him by his looks. And it's not okay to judge by look. You need to at least take the time to get to know that person and their situation to know where they're coming from, to know what they've been through.

Because how can you tell someone no, you can't have a home? I mean, they're the ones who need it the most. Because I've been told no numerous time and I was working and staying in my car with my son and trying to get my own apartment just, without the help and I was still being told no. I don't have the resources to get my apartment. I don't have the background. I don't have the rental history; but it's like, you're not giving me the chance to show you that I

can be a good tenant. It's just more of the community and the way everyone's looking or what they perceive from everyone else and what they're saying that society should be. And if you help this one person, he can still be that same person that you are, too.

Woman: Okay, so yeah, I could add to the discrimination issue. I'm an old Seattle girl and my, I mean, I go back three generations. My mom went to Garfield. I went to Roosevelt. I grew up in a diverse community. I worked at Nordstrom downtown in the '80s and '90s for ten years. So the thing that I explained about my husband not being allowed to use restrooms, that was something we experienced in our home community in Shoreline. When we switched over here and got the housing, we were thrilled.

We had a need to replace my husband's debit card. We'd been customers of Bank of America for years and years over in North Seattle. And we come over here to replace my husband's debit card and it took us three visits to one of the Redmond Bank of America's to accomplish this task that took no more than ten minutes. Because it took us that many tries, the previous visits to the branch we went to, I won't say which one, we were actually requested to come back another day because they were busy.

I've spent close to thirty years in the retail industry and this is the good old United States of America. It's a capitalist economy. And it's entirely un-American to me to be asked to leave a business for the simple sake that the business is busy. It's anti-business. I had gone so far to have a conversation with this over the phone with the branch manager, but frankly, I have too many problems on my plate to take the time to write a letter to whoever's above him. I have the person's name and address, but I don't have time for this.

So, to walk into a bank and I come in with my walker and my husband's a little tipsy and he has a funny head. And to be asked to come back is, it just blew my mind. So, that is just, when I worked downtown, I was trained up old school by the Nordstrom family. They would come in and if we weren't, everyone fell into place and did above and beyond. That simply was a way of life and I'm thankful for the training I had and the time that I worked in that environment.

The thing is, that I would say to business owners is to get over your fear of someone walking in with a backpack. The person that walks in your front door is your customer. If you have no one coming through your front door, you have no more customers. You have no more business. So find ways to embrace the people coming through your front door, whether or not they look like they have dressed themselves from whatever's currently on the racks at Nordstrom or whatever the hot store is these days, because I'm not with it anymore. I've gotten old.

But the people walking through your door are your customers. What you assume about them has nothing to do with the business. And so, how communities could support the people on foot, the people that don't have anywhere to go, I'm not sure what the solutions are yet. I haven't processed it all yet because I have too many problems on my plate right now. So, one thing I've been wondering about, I've never had the luxury of traveling to Europe, but I have heard of these things called hostels. People would probably go, oh no, not in our community, but if you think about, light rail is coming. It's being built in Shoreline. It's coming somewhere around here.

There will be more people floating through, on foot, with backpacks, with legitimate business at hand. They may not be able to travel back home, wherever home is. Maybe the motels and the hotels aren't their fit, but the people on foot, floating through, are going to increase, the coming and going. There are solutions that can be found. It needs to be folded in and embraced and supported because once the people have healed and rebuilt themselves, they'll be a functioning part of the community and the economy.

Woman: The one thing I also have with, maybe just working with churches and community, I know that Timberlake Community Church is part of a Redmond church; I actually go in, that they have, like Monroe; they've built several different campus. They're all about community and giving back and helping out. They actually give funds to Hopelink. They give funds to the Acres of Diamonds in Duvall and I'm sure if they were addressed, they would be more than willing to help causes like this. They help fund, do orphanages out in Africa. I mean, they just help everywhere and try to give back.

So maybe, I know there's a separation of church and state and all that, but still, just even going that far to see what we can do, ask the community to work together to give back and help support each other. I know that there's several mechanic shops or auto body shops that actually help people out that are in need too with either reduced costs for repairs on cars or even getting cars for free. So I know that there are resources out there. They just need to be the more well-known.

Woman: One thing I would add, I think to assume also, that there's a price for every approach that we take systemically to solve a problem or work on a problem. And those are limited dollars, so they get funneled, one person to another. And I think that, something I would just probably add is that those funds can be spent in an adversarial displacement approach that will solve some problems, maybe, some visibility problems. But a festering problem is no, it's not a solved problem.

So whether you spend funds one way or the other, the adversarial displacement is really not going to do a whole lot to solve an overall problem that, if you can get individuals working together to doing some of the things that they

mentioned as far as embracing, whether it's retail or some of the public accommodations like libraries and other things; getting some approach that, I don't want to say softer or gentler, [inaudible words] mean that, but something that's just more aware and understanding of how complex the issue is, those dollars could then be spent effectively.

It doesn't help any one of those people to fool, you know, there are a lot of cities across the nation that have tried the adversarial displacement, homeless camps, you've got to be here during a certain time of day, you can't go out of that place. It doesn't solve the problem of homelessness. It displaces it to other communities and we're in a community that backs up to lots of other communities.

So there is no such thing as not in my back yard, everybody is the back yard. So I would just encourage your task force and others who are coming to your meetings to really think about, if everybody's displacing it, you're going to get somebody else's displacement, so it's no solution at all, really, just a bunch of recycling.

Woman: In caring that out that once a community jumps in and starts tackling how this can be absorbed into their community, if it reaches a point where it's possible to fold in a way to find housing, to wrap it around the children of the family first. And if it's possible to house school-aged students with their families in their home-based community that they find themselves homeless in, if the housing stays within the same community the children go to school in, that allows the student to continue to be more successful and the homeless situation would be a little more seamless while they're students. Or at least if there's also a way to house them as close to their home school as possible, that probably would contribute to more successful students during their homeless time.

Colleen: Thank you. Are we done? I'll turn it off.